

ST. LOUIS REACHES MILESTONE IN BATTLE TO REDUCE OZONE

In 1991, the city of St. Louis and St. Louis, Jefferson, St. Charles and Franklin counties were designated as a “moderate nonattainment” area for ground-level **ozone** under the federal Clean Air Act. This means the area did not meet the federal health-based standard for this pollutant. Ground-level **ozone** is not emitted directly into the atmosphere, but forms in the presence of sunlight and warm temperatures when **oxides of nitrogen** and Volatile Organic Compounds react with oxygen. Exposure to **ozone** can contribute to health problems by irritating the respiratory system, causing chest congestion, chest pains, nausea and labored breathing.

In order to reach **attainment** with the one-hour **ozone** standard, the area could have no more than three **exceedances** over a three-year period at any given monitoring site. The St. Louis **nonattainment area** reached this major milestone in 2002, for the first time since monitoring began in the 1970’s. Consequently, the Department of Natural Resources has applied to EPA to redesignate the area to **attainment** with the health-based standard.

EPA has proposed to approve the department’s redesignation request as well as the associated Maintenance Plan, which shows how the department will maintain its improved air quality over the next 10 years. The Maintenance Plan includes all of the controls put into place to bring the area into compliance and also contains contingency measures should additional violations occur. These measures will make sure that the air quality does not backslide.

The St. Louis community has been instrumental in reaching this milestone. Citizens, industry and government agencies joined together to reduce **ozone**. In recent years, several controls have been put into action to reduce the amount of ground-level **ozone**. Some of the control measures include reformulated gasoline, Stage II vapor recovery nozzles on area gas pumps, the enhanced vehicle emissions inspection program known as the Gateway Clean Air Program and numerous industrial controls.

Citizens have also altered their daily activities to help in the efforts. By carpooling, waiting until the evening to refuel cars, using mass transit and engaging in other voluntary behavioral changes, individuals have reduced **ozone**-causing emissions, especially on days forecasted to have high **ozone** concentrations.

Although the area met the standard in 2002, on Nov. 25, 2002, the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals found that EPA erred in granting St. Louis an extension to its deadline for reaching **attainment**. Under the Clean Air Act, **nonattainment areas** classified as “moderate”, such as St. Louis, had until November 1996 to meet the one-hour **ozone** standard. In June 2001, EPA granted an extension allowing St. Louis until November 2004 to meet the standard. The court sent the case to EPA to take immediate action to reclassify the area to “serious” nonattainment. A “serious” classification requires stricter controls. In keeping with the court decision, in January EPA published notice that the St. Louis **nonattainment area** would become a “serious” **nonattainment area**.

The proposal to redesignate the area to **attainment** and the final rule reclassifying the area to serious were published simultaneously in the *Federal Register*. In its proposal to redesignate the St. Louis **nonattainment area** to **attainment**, EPA is taking into consideration public comment on the bump up to “serious” nonattainment. If EPA decides to redesignate St. Louis as an **attainment area**, it is believed the states will not be legally required to put into practice the additional controls required of a “serious” **nonattainment area**.

Although the St. Louis area met the one-hour **ozone** standard, the battle to reduce **ozone** is far from over. This past year, a federal appeals court upheld the eight-hour **ozone** standard, which is even stricter than the one-hour standard. In December 2002, Gov. Bob Holden received a letter from EPA requesting his recommendation on geographic boundaries for the eight-hour **ozone nonattainment areas** by April 15, 2003. EPA subsequently extended this deadline to July 15, 2003. The new standard will have consequences for both St. Louis and Kansas City.

Ozone season officially begins April 1 and ends Oct. 31. Throughout the season, monitors in the St. Louis **nonattainment area** record the **ozone** levels at 11 sites in Missouri and five sites in Illinois. The **nonattainment area** includes St. Louis City, St. Charles, Jefferson, St. Louis and Franklin counties in Missouri and Madison, Monroe and St. Clair counties in Illinois.